

## World Affairs

# WHEN THE SERVICE WASN'T SO SECRET

BRUCE PAGE, DAVID LEITCH and PHILLIP KNIGHTLEY: *Philby: The Spy who Betrayed a Generation.*

Introduction by John le Carré. 296pp. André Deutsch. 30s.

E. H. COOKRIDGE: *The Third Man.* The truth about "Kim" Philby, double agent. 283pp. Arthur Barker. 30s.

ELEANOR PHILBY: *Kim Philby: The Spy I Loved.* 175pp. Hamish Hamilton. 30s. (Pan Books, 5s.)

It seems the British public can never have enough of spies in general and of Philby in particular. Here are three books in a burst, two of which are serious. The authors of *Philby: The Spy who Betrayed a Generation* have done a good job of work, sober, factual and based on extensive research. It has received the endorsement of its subject, who called it "more or less a true bill" when it first appeared in *The Sunday Times*. Mr. Cookridge has personal experience of intelligence work, he met Philby more than once at crucial points in his career and, by personal investigation and the use of a wide circle of relevant acquaintances, he has been able to produce a well-written and plausible narrative. Though his title is taken from the currently most newsworthy member of what he calls the Unholy Trinity, he deals equally fully with the first and second men, Burgess and Maclean, as do the three *Sunday Times* authors. Mrs. Eleanor Philby's book, on the other hand, is skilfully tailored, no doubt by her collaborators Patrick Seale and Maureen McCoville, for the sentimental end of the market.

The *Sunday Times* team take their point of departure from Cambridge in the 1930s. They are not entirely at home with this subject, which is not surprising since the oldest of them was born only in 1930, a year after Philby went up. This accounts for their belief that there were few scholarship boys at the university. It is not correct that the (Oxford) October Club was "a Marxist splinter group from the Oxford Union Debate" of February 9, 1933. Whether or not the future Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce used to sing "The Red Flag" in his bath, this would not prove what the authors want unless their informant at the keyhole could also depose that he sang it with the proper communist note of contempt in his voice for the anthem of the "social-fascist" Labour Party.

But if the authors are not quite

at home with the generation which their subtitle accuses Philby of betraying, they can follow the trail of his activities with determination and accuracy from the time when he first entered the world of Secret Service. They have no doubts that he was recruited in 1932 and remained faithful ever after to the Russian cause. In a brilliantly sensitive introduction John le Carré draws attention to the missing figure in the story (should he be the Fourth Man?): the figure of the Russian agent who recruited him, and Maclean and Burgess. Perhaps he was British, perhaps a Cambridge man, perhaps in a high social position; all three would seem to follow from the type of recruit he found. The long years in which contact was continuously maintained with Russian Intelligence without any suspicion, although there must have been many changes of control, show a technical skill which would well repay study if it were possible. The results of these pains, his half-lifetime of dissimulation, were as valuable as they deserved: as one judgment quoted here puts it, from 1944-51 the entire Western Intelligence effort was a minus quantity—"we'd have been better off doing nothing". The only consolation the book finds is that Philby destroyed the British Secret Intelligence Service, and that it was so bad that its destruction was an asset.

In *The Third Man*, Mr. Cookridge writes of the work of the various Intelligence Services during the war with greater personal insight. Both Philby and Burgess worked for one or other of these and used their position for the benefit of their Russian directors. Maclean was only recruited into the ring in 1944, by the classic means of blackmailing photographs, according to Mr. Cookridge. His subsequent posting to Washington, where he became joint secretary of the Combined Policy Committee which

handled all matters concerning atomic energy, made him at once one of the most valuable of all Russian informers. During his spell there he handed over documents of great importance. Philby, who remained in the employment of the Intelligence Service after the war, was himself posted to Washington as liaison with American Intelligence. Burgess also turned up there, though in a less important role. From this point on their story is more a matter of public knowledge; it is well narrated by Mr. Cookridge with much vivid and disagreeable detail. It is the *Sunday Times* team, though, which brings out the feature for which most of his acquaintances remember Burgess: how very dirty he was. His habit of chewing garlic was no doubt adopted to annoy other people; not washing was mere self-indulgence.

Mr. Cookridge offers a reappraisal of the respective roles of the three men which sounds convincing. When the first two fled to Russia in 1951 it was generally assumed that Maclean, the senior man, was the ringleader and Burgess merely his homosexual partner and lower-level accomplice; Philby, though suspected, was exonerated from any participation in their treachery. Mr. Cookridge demonstrates that Philby was the planner, the professional agent, Burgess his spotter, and Maclean their prey, a first-class source of information which he could be blackmailed into betraying.

Mrs. Eleanor Philby's acquaintance with her husband dates from his last pre-Moscow period. Having been obliged, though exonerated, to resign from the service he was employed as a newspaper correspondent in Beirut, still, however, doing a little freelance intelligence work, apparently for the British but also, as always, for the Russians. There may be some, mainly the readers of

Original filed under

old-fashioned romances, who find that her account of her husband in *Kim Philby: The Spy I Loved*, reveals an appealing side to his character, but they will not be many, and it was an error on her part, once having praised her husband as a letter-writer, to print so many of his letters. By far the most valuable part of her book is the description of her life in Moscow, where she eventually followed him—but he, after a short time, repudiated her and took Maclean's wife instead. (Incidentally, the relative grading given to the Unholy Trinity in that rigidly rank-conscious society confirms Mr. Cookridge's assessment, with Maclean well at the bottom.) She is the first to come back from the society of defectors, and a dreary life she found it. The winters were particularly hard to bear; it seems Dante was prophetic in placing the traitors in a circle of ice.

The temperance societies of the world should find it valuable to issue abridged versions of these three books as tracts. They are full of descriptions of the drunkenness into which all three men so frequently descended. Mrs. (Eleanor) Philby and Mrs. Maclean, the current Mrs. Philby, follow rather the Hemingway line of regarding such behaviour not as odious or nauseating but as natural and commendably virile. In the Bible Belt, however, or among British readers, there seems a good chance of saving quite a number from the bottle by letting them read the story of how Maclean behaved in Egypt or how Philby on one of his regular wallows drenched his bathroom in his blood; a passage which ends, as in all good tracts: "and if he had had one more ounce of alcohol in his blood he would have been dead". From

that point of view it makes a good moral tale, with a good deal of homosexuality thrown in for those who like a double-barrelled tract; though Mr. Cookridge explicitly exempts Philby. Opinions will differ about the degree of tolerance shown to all three by their official superiors.

These moral failings do, however, raise the question of the degree of confidence reposed in the three by their Russian directors, usually considered a fairly puritanical bunch, glad enough to use such vices as means of blackmail but presumably, by the same token, unlikely to regard them as signs of trustworthiness. There seems no doubt that they were fully satisfied with their services, and rewarded them adequately if not lavishly; even the miserable Maclean is allowed a reasonable subsistence. Mr. Cookridge claims with justice:

They had planted two men, who should have been known to the British security authorities as communists, in key security posts; this was an achievement which neither the British nor the Americans could claim in Moscow.

The British service is notoriously reticent and would certainly never make such a claim, but Mr. Cookridge might have remembered that the claim has been frequently made for them by the Russians; there is Penkovsky, for example, and the most striking case is that of Beria, whom Philby, as a loyal party-liner, is still officially supposed to regard as having been in the pay of that service of which he was once a member. The usefulness of the Russian achievement is now long in the past, except that it will no doubt serve as a warning. If three such unattractive characters turn up again in the public service they will not be given so much rope.